

I wanted to share with you General David Petraeus’ January 25 [letter](#) to allied troops fighting in Afghanistan. As you may know, General Petraeus is the commander of U.S. and allied forces operating in Afghanistan and is credited for previously instituting the counter-insurgency plan in Iraq that played a pivotal role in vastly improving security there. He is, without question, our nation’s most trusted General in uniform today.

I was encouraged by General Petraeus’ letter to our troops. He noted that allied forces, working alongside a growing number of Afghan security personnel, “made impressive progress in our mission” in 2010. He cited security improvements in Kabul (Afghanistan’s capital) Province, Helmand Province, and Kandahar Province, as well as several other areas of the country. He wrote that allied forces successfully “took away some of [the Taliban’s] most important safe havens” and pointed out that there are reports of “unprecedented discord” among the Taliban’s senior leadership.



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*To be sure, General Petraeus also wrote that “there is much work to be done in 2011,” work that will be “tough.” □ He observed that security gains from 2010 must be solidified and that insurgent gains in some parts of the country must be halted. □ Equally important, he stressed that it is critical that Afghanistan’s government be able to provide basic services and “show the Afghan people that a brighter future lies in supporting the new Afghanistan rather than returning to the repressive, brutal days of the Taliban.” □ He noted that allied forces will need to strengthen efforts to combat corruption which is undermining the development of Afghanistan’s institutions.*

I want to emphasize two other extremely important points that General Petraeus made. First, at the beginning of his letter he reminded U.S. and allied troops that the Afghanistan mission “is of enormous importance” because “our core objective here is to ensure that Afghanistan never again becomes a sanctuary for Al Qaeda or other trans-national extremists.” The Taliban—the extremists currently seeking to overthrow Afghanistan’s new government—is the same group that provided sanctuary for Osama Bin Laden and allowed his network of terror to plot that devastating attack on our soil. They would do so again if allowed the opportunity, which is why the mission in Afghanistan is critically important to our national security.

Second, General Petraeus stressed that the withdrawal of U.S. and allied troops must be made “at a pace determined by conditions on the ground.” While I [applauded](#) President Obama for implementing a counter-insurgency strategy in Afghanistan, I remain concerned that he will begin removing troops this summer without regard to the situation on the ground. While I share the President’s desire for American troops to return home, I believe it is essential that they do so based on success in the mission—not on an artificial timeline. I was pleased that General Petraeus emphasized this point in his letter.

*General Petraeus closed his letter by thanking U.S. and allied troops for their “extraordinary service, sacrifice, skill, and resolve.” He could not have more fittingly characterized the remarkable men and women of our armed forces. I will continue to work in Congress to ensure that these brave and selfless servicemembers have every tool and resource they need to succeed in their mission.*